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Excess Without Limits

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The glut of books on the assassination of President John F. Kennedy has become an excess of geometric proportions.

The study of the murder began years ago with the Warren Report, an Euclidean attempt to deal with the world as we usually see it. Then the critics took over, belaboring us with all sorts of pedantic axioms, insisting on a never-never land where parallel lines do meet, where up is down, where in is out, where black is white.

Lewis Carroll, who was after all a mathematician as well as the author of "Alice in Wonderland," might have been able to pull it off. Michael Eddowes, a British solicitor "born to a family of lawyers," misses the mark. His non-Euclidean geometry is not what it ought to be. "The Oswald File" is glaring absurdities, pointless asides and inane observations.

The basic thrust of the book is that Lee Harvey Oswald didn't kill the President — but only because he wasn't Lee Harvey Oswald. The real killer, we are assured, was an imposter, someone whom Eddowes imaginatively catalogs as "LAST NAME UNKNOWN, Alex, Soviet citizen and member of Department 13," the assassination section of the KGB.

As his primary piece of evidence, and there is little else, Eddowes puts forth a variety of documentary reports that Oswald claimed to be 5 feet 11 before defecting to Russia and he came back a lesser man at 5 feet 9. Rarely has so much been made of so little. The discrepancy, we are assured, means that the Oswald we know best was a phony Oswald, an anonymous hit man from the steppes of Russia.

Book World

THE OSWALD FILE
By Michael Eddowes
(Clarkson Potter. 240 pp. $10)

As with most revisionist versions of the assassination, the "evidence" is even more absurd than the notion. Eddowes tells us, for example, that "the plot" to kill Kennedy centered on the choice of a young American serviceman who might be "persuaded to visit the Soviet Union" and who could swiftly be replaced by "a dedicated Soviet look-alike from their (the KGB's and the MVD's) hundreds of thousands of members."

Fancy that. Hundreds of thousands of candidates and not a single look-alike who could measure 5 feet 11? The question apparently never even occurs to Eddowes. He is too busy dwelling on how clever and all-knowing the Soviets supposedly were to acknowledge their palpable stupidity.

Not even Oswald's own mother recognized the difference(s) that Eddowes so belabors. Never mind. She was, we are told, "conditioned" by a variety of factors, such as assurances "by the Department of State and the FBI that the real Oswald was returning."

Eddowes attempts to dispose of other problems in similar fashion. The dead Oswald's fingerprints, for instance, were the same as those of the real Lee Harvey Oswald who served in the Marine Corps before he ever thought of going to Russia. The author of "The Oswald File" is undaunted.

"It must be considered," Eddowes writes, "whether at some early date the Soviets managed to infiltrate the fingerprint filing system of the FBI in order to substitute the imposter's prints for those of the real Oswald."

Propositions like that don't even make interesting nonsense.